

2nd BDE holds first Pre-Ranger Course

Story and Photos By
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Privates, sergeants and lieutenants recently underwent an intense 12-day Pre-Ranger Course to see if they have what it takes to challenge the six-week Army Ranger School.

The course was the first of its kind offered by Baumholder's 2nd Brigade.

In the instructors' living quarters on day 12 of the course, a weary eyed but focused Sgt. 1st Class George Hotaling, Company A, 1st Battalion, 6th Infantry Regiment, explained, "The purpose of the course is to familiarize the soldiers with Ranger School itself. It's a good stepping stone that introduces them to what they should expect," A Ranger himself, Hotaling and a cadre of five other Ranger qualified instructors led the soldiers through 2nd Brigade's first Pre-Ranger Course.

The 1st Infantry Division usually offers a Pre-Ranger Course but since the division was deployed, Baumholder's 2nd Brigade stepped in to put soldiers through the rigorous 12-day challenge. The actual Ranger School lasts 62 days and is divided into three phases. "In the Pre-Ranger Course we try to cover a little of each phase in just 12 days. The main thing we're concentrating on is sleep deprivation and keeping them motivated throughout the course," he said. "Unfortunately, since we're limited in instructors, we are undergoing a little sleep deprivation ourselves."

Hotaling looked at a second instructor sitting on the edge of his bunk. His elbows rest on his knees and his hands cover his face as he talks to a soldier on the bunk next to him. The soldier is busy loading an M-16 clip with blank ammunition. As the rounds click into place, the instructor draws his hands down past his eyes, as if to keep them open, and begins briefing the day's agenda to the soldier who will assist with the training.

Hotaling then dons his rucksack

and heads out the door to start the training day. In his wake are two other soldiers and a medic.

Outside, Hotaling lights a training explosive that rocks the compound, signaling the start of the final training day. The 30 remaining soldiers scurry out of their quarters and fall into formation. Forty-three soldiers began the course but the initial five-mile run in less than 40 minutes and a rigorous physical fitness test quickly weeded out those who lacked the motivation to continue.

For the 30 remaining soldiers intent on finishing the course, training begins with a brief platoon raid scenario near the compound, after which they climb aboard two five-and-a-half ton trucks and drive to the training area. At the drop-off point, they jump out of their vehicles and, together with two instructors, they disappear into the trees. It's their final day of training, but it will be an "all nighter," followed by graduation -- hopefully.

This course is mandatory for soldiers that want to attend the Army Ranger Course. For 12 days, soldiers are tested on their physical and mental stamina with things like sleep deprivation, a physical fitness test, combat water survival, land navigation, a five-mile run in less than 40 minutes, and a 12 mile road march in three hours with a 40-pound rucksack.

The Pre-Ranger Course affords soldiers the opportunity to develop and prove themselves under rugged conditions. It is stress oriented and develops within the student the ability to function under heavy mental and physical stress, according to Sgt. 1st Class Darren G. Johnson, a former Ranger School instructor who helped develop the course for 2nd Brigade.

"The course focuses on realistic tactical training with leaders going through the deliberate planning and execution phases. Each student is evaluated in different leadership positions a minimum of three times throughout the course," said Johnson.

Leadership positions consist of administrative roles of platoon leader and

platoon sergeant. Tactical evaluations are platoon leader, platoon sergeant, squad leader and team leader. These positions are rotated during planning, movement and before actions on the objective.

The course includes classroom instruction and field exercises and averages 18.5 hours of training per day.

After the course, Command Sgt. Maj. William Gunter, 1-6th Infantry Battalion, said, "It was very professionally run, it was very good training and there was good feedback from the soldiers that went through."

Gunter added that he could not see any areas where improvements were needed. "There might be some small areas that we might want to look at for the next time but for the most part, it was up and beyond my expectations," he said. "The course definitely hit home to the soldiers and they're all looking forward to hopefully having another one here soon," he said.

Conducting another Pre-Ranger Course will depend on the brigade's training schedule and the upcoming deployment that most 2nd Brigade soldiers are gearing up for. "We're hoping, maybe before the KFOR deployment, to be able to run one," said Gunter.



Soldiers participating in the Pre-Ranger Course provide fire support during a platoon raid scenario.